

# Qualitative Researcher

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## Methodological challenges of researching communities

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Welcome to the eleventh issue of *Qualitative Researcher* - the first to be produced by the new editorial team who are all Cardiff-based staff working in the newly established Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research, Data and Methods (WISERD). So why the changes? For the past four years, *Qualitative Researcher* has been produced by *Qualiti* which was a phase one node of the ESRC National Centre for Research Methods. The methodological and research capacity building work developed by *Qualiti* is now being taken forward within the WISERD programme of work, and as *Qualitative Researcher* has provided a useful forum for discussion of qualitative methodology we felt that it was important to continue *Qualitative Researcher* as part of this legacy.

WISERD is a collaboration between Cardiff, Swansea, Aberystwyth, Bangor and Glamorgan universities; which is jointly funded by ESRC and HEFCW. Through consolidating existing expertise and research across Wales in quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods, methodologies and analyses, WISERD has embarked upon a programme of data integration, primary research methodological innovation, and capacity building.

One of the WISERD strands of work is to conduct a series of locality studies across Wales and as such many of our staff are engaged with questions and challenges concerning researching place. To reflect this substantive and methodological interest, we chose to explore the methodological challenges of researching communities in our first issue. The four papers presented here provide interesting and thoughtful insights into these challenges from researchers with direct experience of them.

Martin O'Neill reminds us of the importance of considering the embedded power differentials in the research relationships when striving to take a more egalitarian approach to researching communities. He exemplifies how, despite ethical and methodo-

logical challenges, film-making can engage, empower and give voice to young people who are traditionally perceived as 'hard to reach' and whose voices are consequently often not heard. This paper ends by challenging the institutional norms of what is considered valid academic knowledge. In her paper, Anne Foley problematises the representation of marginalised and non-mainstream communities to audiences who inhabit very different social worlds, without reinforcing stereotypes or disempowering these communities. Drawing on her work with the Gypsy and Traveller community, she argues for the importance of making clear the context in which research data are produced in order to sensitise the reader to the social world in which they are created. Kelvin Mason and Mark Whitehead's paper takes the form of a conversation between the two authors in which they reflect on some of the challenges they have faced in researching a contemporary movement for community change and re-localization. Contemplating the methodological and ethical challenges they have encountered, including the researcher's subjectivity in relation to people, places and methods of study, they call for greater honesty when writing and justifying research methods. Like Martin O'Neill, they also call for a more acceptance of 'non-conventional' outputs. Lastly, framing community as social networks and bonds, Andrew Clark and Nick Emmel reflect on their use of participatory mapping of social networks and also of walking interviews in order to provide insight into the dynamic social boundaries of individuals and the significance of space and place to these relationships.

At the beginning of this new stage in the life of *Qualitative Researcher*, we would like to take this opportunity to thank all of those who have worked so hard in developing the journal since 2005. We look forward to continuing this development over the coming years.

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# Using film, video and other multi-media for engaging “hard to reach” young people - Martin O’Neill

## Introduction

Increasingly in the field of conducting research based regeneration initiatives in disadvantaged or disengaged communities there is a growing realization of the importance of developing a more egalitarian participatory based approach to the research enterprise and the whole political process that is involved (Bowler et al 2007), i.e. establishing greater dialogue and reciprocity between researcher and researched. However, if this dialogue is to be successful it is important to establish some form of parity between these two voices as obviously there are some significant power differentials contained within any such relationship. If those who belong to socially marginalized groups find that their voices are discounted or not listened to and generally do not have the same “worth” as those who are instigating the research they will quickly disengage from the process; such an approach has the potential to further compound social exclusion, disengagement and the difficulty of conducting research in such environments rather than provide an effective and meaningful methodology.

This paper will examine a concrete example of the utilization of participatory video production with young people that not only acted as an effective research tool but also contributed to the development of cultural, linguistic (Bourdieu: 1990) and social capital (Putnam: 2000) in a post industrial community in South Wales.

## The challenge of engagement

In communities where it is difficult to access legitimate employment, individuals rationally formulate various strategies to augment their material resources that can contribute to the development of an ‘alternative economy’ that often operates on the margins, or outside the law. It can include, at its most benign and entrepreneurial, petty benefit fraud, working for cash payments at building and other service jobs, setting up unlicensed and unregulated private taxi services and at the more criminal end of the spectrum, drug-dealing, car theft and re-sale of stolen mobile phones and auto parts. In towns such as Merthyr Tydfil, some twenty miles north of Cardiff, which historically has experienced unemployment levels of double the national average, car related crime statistics are also

nearly twice the national average (British Crime Survey 2008) and the area has the second highest level of substance abuse in Wales, well above the national average (WAG 2007).

Much of this risky/illegal behaviour begins at an early age and is already a way life for many young people in the 12 to 18 age group. Therefore, understandably, a group that are particularly difficult to engage in such an environment (O’Neill and Williams 2004) are young men between the ages of sixteen and twenty-five. Developmentally, this group is forming its own precise and exclusive forms of self-expression that are meant to exclude older people and those in authority, especially if its members are experimenting with behaviours that are considered to be undesirable or unacceptable by school authorities or the law. Additionally it is with this age group that risky/illegal behaviours start to develop and take hold and provide a model for the remainder of adult life and for initiatives aimed at breaking the cycle of poverty it is crucial that this group be engaged.

## Using film and video to engage young people: A case study

As part of an ongoing Action Research programme conducted in communities to the north of Merthyr Tydfil, the local community development trust were interested in conducting a research initiative aimed at understanding the barriers that prevented local people entering or returning to the labour market and a group which were particularly over represented in the local unemployment statistics were young men. The original idea to develop some activity that utilised video and other media based approaches as a vehicle for engaging these ‘hard to reach’ youth networks emerged following a conversation with a local youth worker. The worker identified that a previous community development initiative aimed at producing a short film had been particularly successful at engaging, for quite a considerable period of time, those exact networks that it had previously been found difficult to engage.

Particularly since the development of digital technologies, the equipment required to produce good quality video

output is relatively cheap and simple. Utilising a good laptop computer, hand held video camera and tripod it is possible to produce professional looking video output with relatively little training. Video production is something that many young people are familiar with as many of the “YouTube Generation” use mobile phones or cheap handheld video cameras to produce video content that they can then easily broadcast via YouTube and other video sharing websites. One of the most successful instances of this approach was a “music video” made with a local group of young men who were interested in rap music. Facilitating the opportunity for the group to professionally record and produce a video of their rap was a powerful motivation for the group to engage with the project. Therefore this approach represented a particularly powerful strategy for targeting and engaging some of the most difficult youth groups in the locality.

Although, due to the particular artistic medium involved, there is an element of Americanisation to the video the group produced, the ethos behind the production encouraged the group to work in their indigenous Valleys’ vernacular and to pursue the often repeated axiom of creative writing: ‘Write what you know!’. The resulting subject matter is one that is familiar to anyone in the area where drug and substance abuse and the death of young men is a familiar experience which, while leading to quite strong feelings of social identity and solidarity, is tempered by a desire to escape and a belief that there is more opportunity and reward available elsewhere.

Those involved took great pride in their production and put a lot of time and effort in to ensuring that they achieved a high level of quality both in relation to the music and the finished video. After its completion the video was posted on YouTube and quickly started to receive a good number of hits, at the time of writing the video had received 31,906 hits and is available at:

([http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gTl2deX1H8Q&feature=Playlist&p=73E50591447A46C9&playnext=1&playnext\\_from=PL&index=11](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gTl2deX1H8Q&feature=Playlist&p=73E50591447A46C9&playnext=1&playnext_from=PL&index=11))

Additionally it has become something of a cult classic among local young people and has also obviously been viewed further afield.

The production of the video also facilitated further engagement with local young people as it provided a focus for discussion about the reason for its success where people said it represented a certain form of “reality” as it reflected certain aspects of day-to-day life of living in this environment. To examine the reality of the world portrayed by the video a number of focus groups with local young people were held. The groups were interested in and discussed how much of the story they thought was fact and how much was fiction and from this discussion a number of anecdotes and recounting of experiences emerged that served to bolster the believability of the video to the group. Although as with any group of people, young or otherwise, there was a degree of bravado and story telling the main theme that emerged in relation to the video as a research tool was that although it could be argued that what it recounted was not a verbatim recounting of the “truth” everything was believable as it was based on real events that had a lot of plausibility within the experiences of those who are members of the community. It was ‘true’ in the sense that it reflected reality as they experienced it. Although this video represents the production of a work of fiction recounted in the local vernacular, i.e. not a traditional research output, as with many other “fictionalized” accounts it is based on real life experience, hopes and aspirations based on events experienced in their own lives and can also be viewed as a true cultural artifact in the anthropological sense of the word.

Therefore via the use of video production it has enabled these young people, who it would have been difficult to engage with via other methods, to tell their story and although it could be argued that the resultant story is a mixture of both fact and fiction the message that emerges is both powerful medium for conveying a message that contains the “truth” of the lived experience of young unemployed men living in a community classified as deprived.

### **Using the creative process as a research tool**

As this case study has illustrated, the creative process can be a useful tool for both engaging and also producing useful research output as it provides the members of such groups who are traditionally difficult to engage with a medium to express themselves in a way that is both powerful and enjoyable.

Research initiatives that utilise creative processes, such as this, can allow participants to speak their own language without it being dismissed as grammatically wrong or socially unacceptable. The author James Kelman has argued, “There’s no such thing as bad language.” (BBC Late Show Interview). Indeed, some of the Glasgow cultural icons of Kelman’s writing such as snooker halls, betting shops, pubs and DHSS offices are shared with the residents of the housing estates of South Wales. Using the language and icons of the people through storytelling, writing, film and the like can enable the development of meaningful research that in turn can inform powerful regeneration initiatives aimed at breaking the cycle of poverty by engaging rather than alienating local culture.

Although such an approach can be challenging to more traditional research outputs, both ethically and methodologically, as gone is the anonymised and anonymous actor of the traditional ethnographic monograph. This more participatory approach however produces vocal and active collaborators in a more dynamic and inclusive research enterprise. This, in turn, reflects the changing nature of the social world, particularly in the production and distribution of news, documentary and other forms of reporting and broadcast media. These changes require that those who examine the social world, particularly utilising ethnographic type methodologies, need to re-examine their ethical and methodological boundaries if they are not to become anachronistic (Prosser et al 2008). Moreover, such an approach can, if used sensitively, build on and remain true to the tradition outlined in Atkinson’s and Hammersley’s observation that in the construction of an ethnographic study:

“The ethnographer needs to recognize the crafts of story-telling and learn to develop them critically...The point for the practising ethnographic author is, therefore, the need to recognise the analytic power of the narrative reconstructions in a disciplined manner” (1995: 250).

### **Conclusion**

As such classic anthropological work by the likes of Levi-Strauss (1955) has illustrated, stories, myths and legends contain the values and wisdom of a particular culture. Contemporary Valleys’ culture and the vernacular that it uses to express itself have often been marginalized and undervalued in a process of

Bourdieuian symbolic violence (Bourdieu 1991). Welsh Valleys’ culture, as with many folk cultures, has a strong story-telling tradition that is evident in any pub, community centre coffee morning, or school playground on any day of the week. The strong storytelling tradition and the powerful use of the vernacular to illustrate and give depth to such stories can be harnessed for providing valuable insights into the culture that produces these stories (Jenkins 2001). Film and video production and the intelligent use of information and communication technology can provide immediate means for developing the voices of participants by giving value and power to local language and using it to shape creative self-expression.

Particularly in relation to young people it is often the cultural norm in such disaffected disengaged communities that anything identified or seen as related to education, schoolwork or academia in any way is ‘not cool’. The production of film and video content can challenge this perception as producing ‘cool’ films to be broadcast on Youtube is a strong motivator for groups to become and remain involved. At the same time this approach will also necessarily challenge the cultural norms of the academic institutions as to what constitutes valid knowledge and desirable outputs. Such an approach will generate far more than academic papers and research outputs and this needs to be recognized and appreciated as a valuable contribution to the overall research process and that effective research in such situations is more multi-faceted and dynamic than simply appearing in such communities, collecting data and then disappearing back into our University institutions. From both sides it will require greater commitment, and openness to imaginative and innovative ways of working being developed in a dialogue with all those involved.

As the theoretical framework of this paper has argued and the case study illustrated there is great potential for addressing the increasing difficulty of conducting effective meaningful research in communities that are suffering research fatigue if a more reciprocal imaginative methodology is developed.

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Dr. Martin O'Neill's research interests include health, work and employment and socio and economic regeneration. He is currently employed at Cardiff University's School of Social Sciences where he teaches and acts as research co-ordinator. Previously he has conducted ethnographic research and on the impact of the decline of traditional industries on communities throughout the U.K.

## The role of the researcher: when two social worlds collide - Anne Foley

Researching marginalised communities is often thwarted by a number of ethical and moral problems. As social scientists, we are driven by the need to develop a greater understanding of how different actors make sense of their social world (Coffey and Atkinson 1996). Yet, representing data on marginalised communities can have many implications; potentially, we can further disempower those very communities we seek to empower. This paper addresses this issue, drawing on data collected as part of a PhD. project; it will discuss my role as a researcher in representing data that conflicts with the values of my social world and those professed by the wider society, the dilemmas this may cause, and how I attempted to overcome them. The paper will begin by outlining the problems I encountered researching the Gypsy and Traveller community<sup>1</sup> in England and Wales.

The Gypsy and Traveller community are fiercely proud and protective of their culture, as such; there is reluctance among Gypsies' and Travellers to allow 'gorgers'<sup>2</sup> to enter their social world (Weckman 1994). I have always felt very honoured that not only was I allowed by the Gypsy and Traveller community to participate in their activities, but also by the trust they bestowed upon me to hear their stories and represent the world of the Gypsy and Traveller community to the *gorger* society. Hence, I felt an enormous responsibility to ensure the social world of Gypsies and Travellers was represented accurately, while at the same time wanting to be careful not to further disempower this already marginalised community.

The Gypsy and Traveller community is often viewed with curiosity and suspicion; sometimes portrayed as 'lawless', having little regard for the values of British society. For example, a recent BBC documentary *'The Gypsy Child Thieves'* depicted Gypsy and Traveller children living outside of the law. The documentary arguably fuelled stereotypes of the unruly nature of Gypsies and Travellers. Public policies have also meant Gypsies' and Travellers' are often marginalised or excluded; forced to live on the fringes of our towns and cities (Richardson 2005 and Weyrauch 2001). Actually, in social science terms, very little is known about this vulnerable community and what is known tends to be based on conjecture and stereotypes. In researching this community I was acutely aware of the potential consequences of representing the social world of Gypsies and Travellers, and the importance in not further fueling stereotypes. Nevertheless, the potential of this was apparent in the representation of data I collected, and compounded by the area I set out to research; the attitudes of the Gypsy and Traveller community towards crime and deviance, and the methods they use to deal with those who transgress the moral codes of their community.

### Background

There were three distinct research questions underpinning the research on which this paper draws;

- Do Gypsies and Travellers have a common set of shared values?
- How are resolutions to deviant and criminal acts dealt with by the Gypsy and Traveller community?

How and when do members of the Gypsy and Traveller community have

recourse to formal agents of social control?

My main methods of data collection were ethnographic, including interviews, participant observations and notes written by members of the Gypsy and Traveller community on specific and relevant life events, as well as the use of visual images of crime used to act as a discussion aid. The names of all the respondents presented in this paper are pseudonyms. However, I have drawn upon common names used in the Gypsy and Traveller community.

At the outset of this paper, it was acknowledged that Gypsies' and Travellers remain a under researched community; yet, what was evident throughout this research, is that members of the Gypsy and Traveller community wanted their stories heard, which meant I felt an even greater responsibility. The following account by Billy illustrates the wish for their stories to be told.

*Anne, do you follow what I'm saying... but like that's another story to go in to... I should tell you about that you'll find it interesting for your work...*

At all stages of the research, members of the Gypsy and Traveller community made sure that I fully comprehended their accounts of their social world. This, along with the rapport I developed with the Gypsy and Traveller community, although not entirely free of problems, allowed for a rich source of data. As such, I feel an immense responsibility toward members of the Gypsy and Traveller community, including the ways in which I chose to

represent the data. To illustrate this I will draw on the example of fighting. Gypsies and Travellers hold a markedly different attitude toward physical fighting in comparison to the wider society, yet this in turn means that they are often depicted as 'lawless' (Weyrauch 2001).

### Fighting

Fighting acts as an important sanction among Gypsies and Travellers; it is a system that is used when an individual or group have deviated from the moral codes (Acton *et al.* 1997). For Gypsies and Travellers the fighting system is equally as important as the penal system to the wider society. Indeed, the fighting system arguably has more legitimacy among Gypsies and Travellers and takes precedence over the British Criminal Justice System (Acton *et al.* 1997). For Gypsies and Travellers the ability to defend one's honour and that of their kin is incredibly important; the failure to do so is considered shameful. The participants in my research discussed the importance of fighting in their culture. The following quote is taken from notes written by Sonny; here he is talking of the respect and honour that good fighters are given within the community.

*Fights between Gypsies can be brutal and long, they are always private, no outsiders... they are known as the King of the Gypsies. They don't wear crowns or live in castles they were modern day gladiators. Two would stand toe-to-toe for half, one or two hours, bare knuckles, 'til one could fight no longer... Some called themselves King of the Gypsies, because of his title he was not treated like royalty but wherever he went people would know that he was the fighter on top, ready to take a challenge, day or night. Men like this are respected in their day, the same as a judge or a doctor or a high-class gentleman...*

As this extract illustrates, fighting among Gypsies and Travellers has a different role to that held by many in the wider British society; this has led to a somewhat contentious relationship between the Gypsy and Traveller community and others. For instance, it has meant that public places have often barred the community from entering and there have been increasing concerns raised over the use of 'no Gypsies allowed' signs in pubs around the country (Lomax *et al.* 2000).

All members of the Gypsy and Traveller community are expected to fight, if and when the need arises. This includes

women and children. During my research I came across a number of instances in which women and children were involved in a dispute. It is here that the tension lies; how does one represent this form of fighting without invoking the labels that others may already have on this marginalised community? Here I provide an example of one such incident and then go onto say a little bit on how I have attempted to overcome this problem.

The example is taken from field-notes; a group of young people from the Gypsy and Traveller community had been on an organised day-trip and were returning home when an incident broke out;

*As we were returning home Jimmy started playing up, shouting at the driver, swearing and trying to get out of his seat. The driver was asked to pull-over so that the situation could be dealt with... the group were told that if they didn't behave they would not be able to go out the following week... the young people were getting off the bus... Jimmy's older sister (Tall-girl) got hold of him and started smacking and punching him really hard, dragging him by his ear off the bus... (field-notes 2007).*

Tall-Girl's reaction to her brother's misbehaviour could be seen as somewhat excessive, indeed, Jimmy had already been issued with a week's ban from the centre (responsible for organising the trip). As a result of her actions, Tall-Girl was also given a week's ban, for which she was very angry. The mother of Jimmy and Tall-Girl was informed of the ban; she readily accepted that Jimmy's behaviour was unacceptable but was concerned that Tall-Girl was being punished for doing what was expected of her; that is, chastising her younger brother's wrongdoing.

This example, one of many such incidents, illustrates the difficulty in researching the social world of others, particularly when their morals conflict with ours. In this situation, Tall-Girl acted in the way that was expected of her; her younger sibling had misbehaved. In doing so, he had brought shame onto the reputation of the family and it was her responsibility to publicly make amends for this. Yet, this meant that she too was now seen as misbehaving, for which she had to be punished by the play scheme workers who had taken them on the day-trip.

The problem here is two-fold; firstly, there is the issue of making moral judgements. Tall-Girl's reaction to her brother made me very uncomfortable. She is a sturdy girl, able to articulate herself and has a very strong personality. In contrast, Jimmy is much younger, very slight; who does not always know how to respond in social situations. Yet, is it my responsibility to make judgements about this behaviour *or* do I merely describe what is being observed? The second issue concerns how data are re-presented; as previously noted, the discourse on Gypsies and Travellers tends to be negative; social policies, the media and society act to socially construct them as such (Richardson 2005). Therefore, presenting data that relates to fighting among Gypsies and Travellers out of context could serve to strengthen this negative representation.

### The resolution

The members of the Gypsy and Traveller community who participated in this research were keen to have their story told. The reason behind this was that they wanted non-members of the Gypsy and Traveller community to better understand their social world and the meanings and reasons behind their actions. They understood that they do many things differently to the *gorge* world and this may make them appear deviant. What concerned the members of the Gypsy and Traveller community I encountered during the course of this research, is that by providing their accounts, a better understanding of their community could be developed. Indeed some hoped that by hearing their voices, which has often been overlooked by social science researchers, a change in policies and attitudes toward Gypsies and Travellers could be attained.

So, how do I re-tell the stories, such as the one outlined above, that not only conflicted with my attitudes and beliefs but also has the potential to reinforce the many negative stereotypes that others may hold of the Gypsy and Traveller community. The way I have attempted to manage this situation, is to ensure that the reader is fully informed of the context from which data represented are produced. Therefore, the reader is sensitised to the social world of Gypsies and Travellers and, as such, can see that the Gypsy and Traveller community, rather than being simply and universally 'deviant', abide by a very strict moral code. While at times this code can conflict with the values held by the re-

searcher and the wider society, the existence of the code means that the community is far from 'lawless'. As for me, I have learnt not to judge the actions of others based on my own moral compass, and by doing so, I have gained a rich and valuable source of data from a community generally reluctant to allow *gorgers* inside, let alone research and represent their world.

<sup>1</sup> The Welsh Assembly Government request that Gypsies and Travellers should be capitalised in recognition of their ethnic minority status.

<sup>2</sup> *Gorger* is a Gypsy and Traveller word to describe non-Gypsies or Travellers, the spelling can vary among different Gypsy and Traveller groups.

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# Minding a mendacious methodology: Community-based research in a transition town - Kelvin Mason and Mark Whitehead

This paper sets out a conversation concerning some of the methodological and ethical issues we have encountered as part of our participation in, and research of, a prominent contemporary movement for community change and re-localization. In discussing the ethnographic methods we use to research the Transition Town movement<sup>1</sup> we feel both duty-bound and inspired to write as candid an account as we are able. This candour leads us to argue here in support of the ethical imperatives associated with participatory research, but for more attention to be given, and greater openness displayed, towards the practical challenges that such work presents to academic studies of various kinds. To these ends, we build upon existing scholarship within geography (Maxey, 1999), feminist studies (Roseneil, 1993) and action research (Stringer, 2003) on the practises and inevitable compromises of embedded research, and consider its implications for academics embroiled in transition communities. More specially, we consider how the forms of the Transition Movement itself present specific challenges to academic engagements.

## On methodology

*Kelvin:* I take methodology to mean the logic that links ontology, epistemology and research methods. My (world) view is that the Transition Town movement could be a force for social change, specifically in reducing carbon emissions and building resilience in response to the problems of climate change and peak oil, respectively (Hopkins, 2008). In part anyway, the knowledge to bring about

this reduction and resilience will be socially constructed locally. The methods I could employ to research the Transition Town movement must, then, reflect my concurrence with its aims and my involvement in this process of knowledge-making. In short, and also in accord with the Research Protocol developed by the Transition Town Network, the only philosophically consistent methodology for me in this instance is participatory action research (PAR). But what does that mean in terms of compatible methods of data collection and reporting? Does it, for instance, mitigate interviews or focus groups? Is ethnography the only option?

*Mark:* I agree with Kelvin that methodology is not about the pragmatic tool-kit of research (should I develop a questionnaire? Should I conduct interviews? Should I adopt a covert research approach?), but a way of thinking through the connections between the ways in which you feel it is possible to gain knowledge of the world and how you may go about practically obtaining such insight. But I believe that too much time and energy is spent on justifying the relational consistency of methodology: in creating a hermetically and neatly sealed continuum between the nature of knowledge and how it may be gained (i.e. I am a positivist hence my recourse to quantitative technique; I am a post-structuralist hence my reliance on a more open-ended set of research strategies). My argument is not that we should abandon that sense of methodological rigour that makes us ask why we conduct research in the ways we do. My beef is with the

retrospective justification of methods on the basis of some deep-held methodological belief. My experience of working within and researching the Transition Town Movement has forced me to think much more about the everyday pragmatisms that ultimately shape our methodology choices (but often get submerged within a rhetorical sea of post-hoc rationalizations).

## On positionality

*Kelvin:* Both Mark and I were pleased when Gavin Brown turned participant observation, with its conventional detachment, on its head. Gavin presented his research as observant participation, engaging 'with the materiality and practices that constitute these activist networks and spaces' (Brown, 2007, p. 2686). This deceptively simple reversal seemed to us essential in describing our identity as participants in the Transition Town movement who were observant in a particular way, i.e. academically. By contrast we could have been participating *in order to* observe. The distinction is in our *primary motivation*: participation versus observation. We are in the Transition Town movement first as citizens: we would be involved whether or not we were going to observe in that context; whether or not we were going to get something academic out of it (see for instance Anderson, 2002, BRE, 2007, Chatterton et al., 2008).

*Mark:* My engagement with the Transition Town movement began one evening in the spring of 2007. I remember hearing about a community screening of

the film the *End of Suburbia* that was being shown in the local chapel hall in order to raise awareness of Transition Town Aberystwyth. I remember being swept away that night as 200 local residents gathered to watch the film and later talked passionately about making a more sustainable and socially inclusive future for Aberystwyth in the post-peak oil age. I also recall being drawn to the Transition Town movement in two ways: at one level it felt wonderful to be part of a new and politically open attempt to foster community change in the area; but at a other level I couldn't help being interested in what was happening intellectually (I had written and taught about inclusive forms of sustainable urbanism for ten years and suddenly it seemed to be happening). Was my interest in Transition Town Aberystwyth altruistic or selfish: was it about what I could give to the movement, or what the movement could give to me? I felt that night like I was standing on the threshold that marks out the *participant observer* from the *observant participant*.

### On activism and citizenship

*Kelvin:* There is something mendacious about the very idea of methodology in the context of my involvement in Transition Town. I became involved with Transition Town Aberystwyth, TT Aber, because a friend and fellow activist citizen took the initiative to initiate a local group. Whether I responded first and foremost because Albrecht is my friend or because he is part of the same political community is impossible to dissect. Certainly, Albrecht became a friend because of our mutual involvement in Aberystwyth Peace and Justice Network and through working together to stage Social Forum Cymru in Aberystwyth in 2006. I remember asking Mark to join the TT Aber steering group for principally strategic reasons. Aware of his commitment to environmental sustainability and his experience with instigating Fairtrade at Aberystwyth University, I thought he could help form a link between 'town and gown' and bring a relevant knowledge to bear: I was not thinking research methods nor academic outputs.

*Mark:* My uncertainty about why I was getting involved in the TT Aberystwyth in many ways stemmed from the nature of Transition Culture itself. Emerging out of the practical philosophies of permaculture and eco-living, the Transition Town movement seeks to construct a positive local attitude to the impending threats of climate change and peak oil.

In suggesting that local communities had the skills and energies to deal with these geo-historic threats, the Transition movement asked that you leave your cynicism at the door. As an academic I have, however, become rather attached to my healthy (and at times unhealthy) sense of cynicism, particularly when it comes to attempts to try and regenerate local communities. When Kelvin asked me to join the steering committee of Transition Town Aberystwyth, however, I felt duty-bound to say yes: it was time to not just write about making sustainable towns and cities, but to help in building them (I left my cynicism, however, just inside the door!)

### On methods: professional instinct and habit

*Kelvin:* Out of academic habit and because it is part of the knowledge building that constitutes TT Aber, I kept a record of the emerging archive: minutes of meetings, email traffic, press releases, photographs... Similarly, reading up on the 'theory' – the constitutive ideas of Transition – was a part of seeking to become an effective member of this community project. When I wrote about the Transition Movement's Annual Conference in 2007, I did so first and foremost as a report back to TT Aber, although by then I was developing a parallel – or rather entangled – academic interest: I had become conscious of co-constructing the archive. So, if I have to put names and categories to it, my methods were archival research, a literature review and ethnography. The parts of my identity that are engaged citizen and sometimes public intellectual do not categorise methods this way, however. Perhaps the citizen and public intellectual act more from ethical intuition than philosophical design? Meanwhile, the academic, *instinctively*, covers his back with talk of methodology.

*Mark:* My methodological approach to studying the Transition Town movement is in part defined by my uncertainty concerning whether I am a *Transition academic* of an *academic Transitioner*. To these ends, I have not conducted any systematic or planned qualitative research of the movement. My approach involves keeping a meticulous personal record of everything I do for TT Aber (including notes of meetings, emails, reflections of transition events, photographs and fliers). While it would be easy to equate my unthinking accumulation of Transition things with a methodological, and epistemological, commitment to avoid pre-determination in my analysis

(see Latour, 2005), in reality it provides a convenient way to support the Transition movement in my town (I often supply the group with photos and old fliers when needed), while not precluding the possibility of rigorous academic reflection at a later date. Was I an observant participant, or an unthinking accumulator?

*Kelvin and Mark:* Unsurprisingly, participatory researchers – at least within Geography – tend to valorise participatory methods and the knowledge made by – and for – participatory processes. While, as exponents ourselves, we certainly wouldn't deny the merits of participatory research, we do wonder what other methods might produce. We can imagine ways in which 'more conventional' qualitative methods, as well as perhaps quantitative methods, could produce knowledge of the Transition Town movement that was both academically valid *and* made a valuable contribution to the movement itself. As just a crude example, wouldn't a questionnaire survey of opinion *within* the Transition movement offer statistically robust data of strategic use *to* the movement? For all our endeavours at the grassroots and all the valuable insights into ourselves and our community that our participatory methods have yielded, I don't think we could use that as a basis for advising the Transition movement on the diversity of its constituency?

### On ethics

*Kelvin:* With respect to ethics, I think we academics can be much too self-conscious, self-important, and in denial of our own mortal citizenship. We can be much too aware of taking away and giving back (Mason, 2007), and trying to keep this balance that we impose on ourselves (from nowhere?). Albrecht is a chef. He has produced food for many citizenly gatherings – public meetings, film shows, debates... From involvement with TT Aber he took the idea of a having a dish with the maximum possible percentage of local ingredients and put that into practice as a daily item on the menu of the restaurant where he works. In due course, he brought that practice back to TT Aber in the form of an idea for a calendar featuring a local dish for each month or the year. When Mark and I 'take-away' the idea to write about the relational nature of the Transition Town Movement and the importance of avoiding a narrow politics of localism (Mason and Whitehead, 2008), I hope we'll be able to bring the fruits of that intellectual endeavour back in to

shape the practice – *our practice* – of TT Aber. I think it's a similar process – or at least possibility – for everyone in the group. Being first and foremost a participant in community defines a research ethic.

*Mark:* Ethical questions really started to arise for me when I inevitably started to bring my accumulated knowledge of the Transition process into the academic world. It started in Canada, where during a research trip to York University I was asked to talk about sustainable urbanism. As the Transition Town movement seemed to me to be one of the most exciting developments in British and Irish sustainable urbanism it appeared important to introduce it to an international audience. I have subsequently spoken about Transition urbanism in a series of national and international seminars and conferences. My academic reflections on Transition Towns produced two ethical concerns: the first was the one I expected and related to the question of whether I had been clear enough about academic motives to the people I had worked alongside in TT Aber [I reconciled this partly by talking at length to fellow Transitioners about what I had said to the academic world]; the second was less expected and involved my attempts to construct a suitably rigorous methodological account of my work on Transition urbanism for an academic audience. It was in my attempts to construct a retrospective narrative of ethnographic research, which would legitimate my research to an academic audience, that I started to become aware of the need to construct a degree of methodological structure that was not (and never could have been) there!

### On being academics

*Kelvin:* As with all participants in the Transition Town movement, academics encounter an economic, material imperative that limits our involvement. We cannot be full-time citizens: we are 'judged' and thence rewarded for our performance as academics, not as citizens or indeed as public intellectuals. Crudely put, our well-being, material and professional, depends not on attending a TT Aber meeting, but on relating that meeting to theory and getting it published or otherwise out-there in academia. Once again, I don't think this is much different for any citizen: Albrecht must produce that daily dish for sale as an economic obligation to his employer; as long as it sells, the employer doesn't care whether the ingredients are local or not. Similarly, as long as this piece gets

published our departments don't care what we believe. In reality, I am being unfair to Albrecht's employer, Adam, who also participated in TT Aber and who does care about the choice of ingredients. Not sure about our academic departments, though: if our involvement in TT Aber resulted in the academic beast missing a meal, I'm sure we'd soon get chewed up and maybe spat out ourselves! (see Fuller and Askins, 2007 also *Antipode* 40:3, 2008)).

*Mark:* Adopting a participatory research approach towards our Transition Town research provided a useful strategy for partially reconciling our practical and academic commitments to the Transition process. But such a methodological commitment came with a cost. A real commitment to participatory research requires a full and continuous immersion in the field of research. Yet as I attempted to juggle the demands of Transition life and academic work (not to mention the arrival of a new baby in my home) I became aware of the fact that my practical inability to be involved fully in the processes of Transition urbanism undermined my methodological position. What is more I came to realize that if I was not an active contributor to the Transition Town process I would, at times, have been more likely to attend certain meetings and events, knowing that my observational attendance would not carry with it further work commitments and responsibilities. My point is not to undermine the value of participatory methods in community-based research, but to suggest that at times we may need to be more open about the reasons why we adopt certain methodological positions and the potential practical costs such choices may have to our ability to produce new insights and support innovative programmes of community development.

### Conclusion

We have argued that methodology necessarily means exploring the researcher's identity and relations with people and place. We highlight a need to be critical of participatory research as an orthodoxy that prescribes certain methods and proscribes others. In so doing, we problematise the concept of a relational consistency between ontology, epistemology and research methods. In particular, we would like to open up the 'hermetically and neatly sealed continuum between knowledge and how it might be gained'. This means academics 'fessing up' to the retrospective justification of methods in order that we can learn from 'real' re-

search processes rather than reproducing mendacious methodologies. Not all academic engagement can – or arguably should – be planned or predicted. It is not therefore practically feasible to have a consistent set of methods in place. Moreover, an unorthodox approach may be revealing of/for the research, research methodology, and researcher.

Another observation concerns the lack of value that academia accords participatory and public engagement by researchers. We feel that, for a start, more space could be accorded to non-conventional research outputs: the graphics, photographs, press releases, strategies, actions, reflections etc. that we generate as (observant) participants in community. On the other hand, if we are to be honest to ourselves, and indeed our Transition community, we must ask whether an academic's most meaningful – and materially possible contribution to social movements isn't as an academic? We are not all, unfortunately, brilliant cooks.

<sup>1</sup> A Transition Town, is an urban community of variable size that is working to build local resilience to the twin threats of climate change and peak oil. The Transition Town Movement has emerged out of the work and writings of the permaculturalist Rob Hopkins, and emphasizes the use of local knowledge, technologies and techniques in creating a socially just low energy future.

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## Connected Lives: Methodological challenges of researching networks, neighbourhoods and communities - Andrew Clark and Nick Emmel

### Introduction

This paper outlines two methods we used in Connected Lives: one of four projects of the ESRC National Centre for Research Methods: Real Life Methods Node. Connected Lives was a qualitatively driven mixed-method research project exploring networks, neighbourhoods and community. We set out to understand the dynamic, processual and contingent nature of relations within an individual's network of ties and contacts (Crow, 2004; Emirbayer, 1997) through a number of methods, including participatory social mapping and walking interviews discussed here. We foreground our discussion of these methods by outlining three methodological challenges of understanding the nature and scope of community. We do not present the methods as panaceas for these challenges but rather hope they stimulate debate into how methodological creativity can offer fresh insight into researching communities.

### Methodological challenges of researching community

There is a considerable amount of literature concerned with understanding community. The term encapsulates ideas about identity and belonging, similarity and difference, inclusion and exclusion, space and time (Delanty, 2003). Some have focused on the conflicts and contestations behind the "common needs and goals... shared lives, culture and views of the world" (Silk, 1999; p6) while others have explored the relational aspects of the networks of ties and contacts that make up "the broad realm of the local social arrangements beyond the private sphere of the home and family" that comprise the "interlocking social networks of neighbourhood, kinship and friendship" (Crow and Allen, 1994: p1). Additionally, Delanty has argued that the

forces of individualisation and globalisation are producing a different type of community - 'communication communities' - that are dependent upon communication enabling social bonding and belonging such that social relations are "organised more like a network... more an imagined condition than a symbolically shaped reality based on fixed reference points" (2003: p188) such as class, kin or neighbourhood.

Hence our first major methodological challenge concerns how to identify the social boundaries of an individual's community (Clark, 2007). Approaching community as the scope of an individual's networks rather than being fixed in geographical locations has the advantage of understanding how people can engage in different types of community (for example of kin, faith, interest and neighbourhood) and recognises the individualised nature of community relations. Yet the sphere of an individual's ties and connections is potentially limitless. Network analysts in particular have addressed this by limiting the number of ties they collect data on. This can be done by restricting the number or type of ties examined, sometimes in rather arbitrary ways, such as the 'five most important people met in out-of-home activities', 'six individuals who are relied upon for support', or more vaguely people who are 'significantly in touch' or 'who are known a little better' by a participant (see Clark, 2007; pp18-20). The potential problems with limiting ties in this way are briefly fourfold: (1) there is little logic as to why these numbers are selected; (2) it is not always clear what is meant by 'significant' or 'known a little better'; (3) it denies the possibility of understanding the impact of different contexts on the nature of relationships, or revealing the nuanced, lived experi-

ences of these ties on a daily basis; and (4) there is a danger of stripping space and time, and the dynamic and processual from contacts during analysis that may focus more on analysing and determining normative attributes in the link between two individuals seemingly untied from geography, history and ongoing activities of building, maintaining and dissembling ties. As we discuss below, in Connected Lives we identified the scale and scope of an individual's community of networks, ties and contacts without imposing our own (researcher) limits on the type and/or number of contacts but rather encouraged participants to offer up their own interpretations of their networks of contacts and ties.

A second methodological challenge concerns how to account for spatial context in the production and understanding of community. It has been argued that globalisation has limited the significance of local places in everyday lives with ties and contacts extending across space. The geographical propinquity that tended to dominate earlier community studies that considered neighbourhood spaces as the locus of community relations is also being questioned. For instance the rise of trans-national migrations and the growth of telecommunications, alongside other changes in economic and social structures have profoundly influenced the nature and significance of locality-based communities (Castells, 1996). After all, just because people may live in the same location, this does not mean they will have any contact with those around them. Contacts are seldom limited by geography as networks, ties and communities stretch across space, seemingly eradicating distances, and with virtual (online) as well as, or even instead of, real (offline) pres-

ence. Yet while the decline in the significance of local neighbourhood spaces is a common critique of studies that approach community and neighbourhood as the same phenomenon, this does not make space redundant in community formation. Rather, it presents new challenges of how to understand spaces as produced and appropriated, and distances over-come, in the making of contemporary community ties (Clark, 2009; Eade, 1997). We were keen to understanding the significance of space and place in community relations in ways which do not succumb to either a determinism that suggests space does or does not account for community, or a romanticism for lost communities that fails to recognise the networked, trans-local nature of contacts and ties.

Finally, and related to both these issues, we wanted to engage with the seemingly ordinariness of everyday, real life relations. It is frequently claimed that qualitative methods are somehow better able to capture or represent the taken-for-granted nature of social life. Not all aspects of contacts and ties can be expressed through (for example) interviews or surveys: these methods may omit the multi-modal aspects of community life; and not everything can be articulated in word or text based format (Dicks et al., 2006). Thus we developed research methods that could record those aspects of real life networks, neighbourhoods and communities that may escape attention in more commonly used methods.

### **Researching community through participatory mapping and walking interviews**

The following two methods were conducted with a sample of 24 participants who lived within one inner-city area of a northern city. All participants were aged between 18 and 30 and comprised of six individuals from four broad groups: students; longer-term, relatively more deprived residents; ethnic minority groups; and young professionals educated to degree level. In essence, we wanted to understand how individuals from different economic, cultural and social groups living within the same neighbourhood perceived of, practised, and maintained networks and community relations within and beyond their local area. We used participatory mapping and walking interviews alongside day diaries and relatively conventional ethnographic methods such as participant observation, key-informant interviews, and the collection of secondary quantitative data. Further discussion of

these methods are reported in Emmel (2008) and Emmel and Clark (2009).

#### *Participatory network maps*

Participatory mapping has been used in two main ways: either to garner rapid knowledge about a locality or to understand knowledge about a particular issue that can be explored through further elicitation (Emmel, 2008). We used a participatory mapping method to metaphorically explore the social landscape of participants' networks. We sought information about who the participant was connected to, the nature of his/her contact with others, and experiences of these contacts. The method consisted of asking participants to diagrammatically represent contacts and ties, though it was emphasised that there was no correct way to do this. A blank sheet of paper, pens and post-it notes were used to draw out the contacts and the interaction was audio and visually recorded. Most participants took about one-and-a-half hours to complete the task, though two requested to keep their network map to complete and return their maps to us. We began with a core question asked of all participants; "tell us about the people who you know". Thereafter discussion was focused upon the nature and type of relations developed during the mapping, though also focused on the research aims of interrogating the nature and meaning of ties and contacts, and soliciting reasons for why the map was produced the way it was.

#### *Walking interviews*

Walking interviews are part of something of a mobile turn in methods to understand locality (e.g. Anderson and Moles, 2008). We presupposed this method would provide insight into how contacts and ties are embedded in and receptive to place, and produce data on how perceptions of neighbourhood spaces might inform senses of community. We did not approach the location where we conducted the research as a particular, singular community, but rather were interested in exploring the spatiality of networks and ties. This method also began with a single core question asked of all participants: "show us around your neighbourhood". What was meant by neighbourhood was left open to interpretation and no restrictions were placed on the size of the neighbourhood or the length of time available for the walk. Participants were given prior notice to allow time to plan where to take us and were provided with a disposable camera. The walking interviews were audio-recorded. As the walk

progressed, questions were asked about where we were, why we had been brought to a particular spot, and what the location and route meant to the participant. Further questions probed the type and extent (if any) of the participants' social networks in the area. In practice, the walks varied in length from 20 minutes to almost 6 hours, taking in shops, places of worship, pubs and cafes, houses where participants had previously lived, and the homes of friends, neighbours and family, sometimes including pre-arranged 'drop-ins' to witness community practices 'in action'. Three participants requested that we conducted all, or part of, the interview by car.

### **Reflecting on the methodological challenges**

We believe these methods were useful in negotiating the challenge of identifying the boundaries of individualised communities; of how to understand the geographies of communities; and of engaging with the everydayness of community relations.

First, our use of participatory methods put participants in control of the data we produced. In the participatory mapping method participants determined which contacts were meaningful to them and reflected on (and, we would argue, began to theorise) why those contacts were meaningful. Participants were not restricted to the type or nature of their contacts and frequently made reference to friends, neighbours, work colleagues, family members, and individuals from the past. In covering such a variety of types of contact, participants were able to consider their community as a more holistic unit, while still situating these contacts in particular contexts and lived experiences. In this way, the visual representations of the maps were crucial in helping participants structure, assess, and develop their thoughts. Participants were also able to make comparisons across and within categories; comparing for example, the different types of relationships with different friends and the circumstances when different contacts were considered more or less significant. Thus the participatory maps were not just social network maps to be analysed later, but elicitation devices that were essential for revealing the fluid, multi-dimensional nature of contacts. Second, participants were able to transcend the distances between contacts, for example discussing ways in which they negotiate contact with individuals living overseas, and the significance of telephony and

on-line communications that were used in nuanced, at times quite strategic, ways to maintain contact. So, the maps revealed not just the social but also the geographical scope of community ties. Their interrogation illuminated ways in which telecommunication practices enable (and at times restrict), contact over distance, so bringing geographically far-away spaces into the everyday locale.

Similarly, the walking interviews afforded participants the opportunity to offer their own interpretations of what neighbourhood meant and where it is located. Giving participants free reign to choose their own locations to show us and routes to travel along meant we went on many different kinds of walks. Some walks were structured around events significant to participant biographies, others around localised contacts such as friends or family living nearby. We learnt much about the spatial contexts of everyday life, and importantly, came to appreciate the ongoing significance of neighbourhood spaces as the location for specific ties. In many walks, participants met acquaintances on the street, and as noted several had arranged for us to call in on friends and relatives in the area. Thus the neighbourhoods we walked through were not simply the bounded, fixed locations in which community ties somehow just happened; rather spaces within and beyond the neighbourhood were instrumental in enabling these ties to develop. We learnt where participants did and did not go, and about how the neighbourhood has changed relative to participants' own changing lives. Thus the walks revealed some of the ways in which time, biography and memory shape understandings of the neighbourhood as a social-space. In doing so, we gained insight into the temporality of community lives; hearing the shared stories and seeing the shared spaces that together produce collective memories of neighbourhood life that are played out in everyday practices<sup>1</sup>. Moreover, we learnt of the extent to which the neighbourhood was the product of relational understandings of other spaces. For instance, stories about a participant's life in the neighbourhood were constructed in relation to events that happened elsewhere; and we saw the extent to which social-spaces beyond the neighbourhood (such as relatives' homes or institutions in other parts of the city) were integral to maintaining contact with others.

## Conclusion

We are not claiming that these methods

have eradicated the challenges we discussed but rather provide insight into how relations with others operate in different biographical, social and spatial contexts. In the participatory mapping method, by not restricting participants to discussion of either a fixed number or type of relationship determined *a priori* by researchers, we were able to understand, describe, and theorise the scope, heterogeneity, and changing nature of contacts with others. The walking interviews provided opportunity to hear, see, and experience some of the spatial practices that make up community life within and beyond locales. Together these methods provided accounts of the dynamics of contact, illuminating the desire for potential face-to-face contact with others that our data suggests is essential for the ongoing maintenance of community<sup>2</sup>.

However these methods are not without problems. The divergent nature of the participatory maps meant that more formal, quantitative network analysis, while seeming tantalizingly possible, could not be conducted because we lack uniform information on participants' contacts, and we cannot not pass judgement on either the density or quality (such as strength or weakness) of such contacts. It was also not possible to track the ways in which community ties extended over space; our walking interviews were restricted to a specific localised geography, though this did not necessarily mean we are unable to reflect on and observe the relational nature of space in the formation of neighbourhood experiences and ties. Instead, what we have are nuanced, sociological accounts about the complicated, dynamic, processual contingent nature of connected lives.

<sup>1</sup>Space does not permit full discussion of the intersection between biography, space and time, which present further methodological and theoretical challenges to studying community relations. The localisation of nostalgia and collective memory in the production of neighbourhood spaces and community relations were themes that emerged from the walking interview method in particular, and appear to accord with other research (e.g. Blokland, 2003).

<sup>2</sup> Further discussion of how we synthesised these methods is available in Emmel and Clark (2009).

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# News and Forthcoming Events

## Upcoming WISERD Events

### International Conference on Qualitative GIS

2nd - 4th August 2010

Cardiff University

Qualitative GIS is an emerging, mixed-method and interdisciplinary research approach that is attracting interest across a range of disciplines.

Despite its growth, Qualitative GIS research is still disparate and there is a lack of international lead with regards methodological and theoretical development and, as yet, no unified body of substantive research. This international conference will consider the emerging issues and possible futures of qualitative GIS.

The conference will take the form of a series of presentations; round-table discussions; break-out groups and networking sessions through which the group will consider the challenges to progressing qualitative GIS and identify how to move forward in collaboration with one other.

<http://www.wiserd.ac.uk>

Email: [wiserd@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:wiserd@cardiff.ac.uk)

## General Conferences and Events

### Timescapes Conference: The Craft of Qualitative Longitudinal Research

20 January 2010

Cardiff University

The development of Qualitative Longitudinal Methods (QLL) for studying people's lives and worlds temporally is an exciting area of innovative methodological work in the social sciences today.

The conference will (i) focus on the promises and challenges of QLL study; (ii) showcase developments in QLL methodology that are being taken forward by the Timescapes network and (iii) consider how a commitment to multidisciplinary working can assist in taking forward the agendas of QLL/temporal study.

<http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/socsi/newsandevents/events/timescapes2010/index.html>

### ESRC Seminar Series - Neighbourhood Effects: Theory and Evidence

4-5 February 2010

University of St Andrews

The main objectives of the Seminar Series are to review theories about how neighbourhoods might shape individual lives; to increase our understanding of methods suitable to analyse neighbourhood effects – free of bias – and the limitations of these methods; to identify potential data sources and data needs; to assess the current state of robust

evidence on neighbourhood effects; to bring together researchers from diverse fields in neighbourhood research to increase our understanding of how neighbourhoods function, develop, change, and might affect individual lives; and to discuss the implications of the seminar outcomes for policy designed to tackle poverty <http://www.neighbourhoodeffects.org/seminar.php>

### Writing Methods Workshop

18 February 2010

University of Manchester

This course is provided by the Realities node of the NCRM.

<http://www.socialsciences.manchester.ac.uk/realities/events/training/>

### Worldwide Conference on Qualitative Research

19-21 May 2010

Prague, Czech Republic

The worldwide conference on Qualitative Research is a forum to showcase the best thinking and practice conducted by qualitative market researchers anywhere in the world. It is a joint venture between the AQR in the UK and QRCA in the USA.

<http://www.qrca.org/displaycommon.cfm?an=1&subarticlenbr=447>

### The 4th ESRC Research Methods Festival

5-8 July 2010

St Catherine's College, Oxford

The Festival aims to engage social scientists across a wide range of disciplines and sectors and at different points in their research careers. We are aiming to stimulate interest, raise issues, highlight opportunities and showcase new developments.

<http://www.ncrm.ac.uk/TandE/other/RMF2010/>

## CAQDAS Courses

### Free Mixed Methods Seminar

17 February 2010

University of Surrey

"Transforming, triangulating and quantifying data – How CAQDAS supports data integration"

### Atlas.ti Introductory Workshop

24 February 2010

University of Surrey

### Nvivo 8 Introductory Workshop

24 March 2010

University of Surrey

<http://caqdas.soc.surrey.ac.uk/workshops.html>

## Calls for Papers

### Euroqual End of Programme Conference: International Perspectives on Qualitative Research in Social Sciences

4-6 May 2010

London

The conference is international in scope and aims at developing further the debate and dialogue around current and future trends and innovations in qualitative methodology across a broad range of disciplines in the social sciences.

We are inviting proposals for individual papers and session proposals (to include 3 or 4 papers) which engage with the exploration of methods and the translation of methodological innovation into research practice.

Please submit a short (max 250 word) abstract of your proposed paper, and/or proposal to organise a session (to include 3 papers with abstracts) in Word format to [euroqual@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:euroqual@cardiff.ac.uk). The deadline for abstracts is Friday 15 January 2010.

For further information on the conference, please contact Helen Greenslade at [euroqual@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:euroqual@cardiff.ac.uk) or visit our webpages at [www.cardiff.ac.uk/socsi/euroqual](http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/socsi/euroqual)

### International Conference on Interdisciplinary Social Sciences

2-5 August 2010

University of Cambridge

The Conference will address interdisciplinary practices across the social sciences, and between the social sciences and the natural sciences, applied sciences and the professions.

<http://thesocialsciences.com/conference-2010/>

### Vital Signs: Engaging Research Imaginations The 2nd International and Interdisciplinary Conference

7-9 September 2010

University of Manchester

How can we engage our research imaginations and rise to the challenge of generating knowledge that is vital and resonates with complex and multi-dimensional lived realities? Vital Signs 2 will provide a major forum for lively and engaged discussion of these issues. Abstracts are now invited in various areas which are intended to inspire the imagination.

<http://www.socialsciences.manchester.ac.uk/realities/events/vitalsigns/>

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*Qualitative Researcher* provides an interdisciplinary forum for social scientists to share their research and discuss questions arising from the application, innovation and dissemination of qualitative research. *Qualitative Researcher* invites contributions in the form of opinion pieces and polemics that stimulate debate; brief articles presenting current empirical research projects; and reports of instances of methodological innovation. Submissions should be between 1500 and 2000 words and as a reflection of *Qualitative Researcher's* pragmatic and inclusive orientation endnotes and references should be kept to a minimum.

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